INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Chickenpox

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What is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is a disease caused by the varicella zoster virus. It causes a rash and fever and can be serious, especially in babies and adults. The chickenpox vaccine protects against this disease.

What are the symptoms of chickenpox?

Chickenpox causes a rash of itchy blisters. It starts on the face, chest, back, and stomach. A person can have 250 to 500 blisters. The rash can spread over the whole body, even inside the mouth. Chickenpox also causes fever, headache, and tiredness. People are usually sick for 5 to 10 days.

How serious is chickenpox?

Chickenpox is usually a mild disease in children. But the itching can be very uncomfortable. Children with chickenpox miss many days of school or child care.

The disease can also cause serious problems, which include the following:

- Bacterial infection of the skin and tissues under the skin (including group A streptococcal infections)
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids) from vomiting or diarrhea
- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Encephalitis (brain swelling)

About 1 out of 500 unvaccinated children who get chickenpox will need hospital care. Most cases are mild, but some can be deadly.

How does chickenpox spread?

Chickenpox spreads easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by touching fluid from blisters.

Children with chickenpox usually must miss school or child care for at least a week to avoid spreading the virus to others.

Benefits of the chickenpox vaccine

- Saves lives.
- Protects against serious disease.
- Prevents discomfort from disease.

Side effects of the chickenpox vaccine

The most common side effects are usually mild and include the following:

- Sore arm from the shot in 1 out of 5 people.
- Fever in 1 out of 10 people.
- Mild rash, up to 1 month after vaccination in 1 out of 25 people.

Serious side effects are very rare but can include the following:

- Seizures (jerking or staring) because of fever.
- Pneumonia (lung infection).

What is the chickenpox vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine protects against chickenpox. It is made from weakened varicella virus that protects children by preparing their bodies to fight the virus.

Some vaccinated children do get chickenpox, but they usually have a very mild case. Most have fewer blisters and are less likely to have a fever. They get well quickly. The vaccine prevents almost all cases of severe disease.









When should my child get the chickenpox vaccine?

Children need two doses of the chickenpox vaccine at the following ages for best protection:

- The first dose at 12 through 15 months; and
- A second dose at 4 through 6 years of age.

Why should my child get the chickenpox vaccine?

The chickenpox vaccine protects against an uncomfortable and sometimes serious disease.

Before the chickenpox vaccine, about 11,000 people in the U.S. needed hospital care each year for chickenpox, and about 100 people died each year of chickenpox.

Is the chickenpox vaccine safe?

The chickenpox vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing chickenpox. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Most people who get the chickenpox vaccine have no side effects. Side effects that do occur are almost always mild, such as pain from the shot or fever. Serious side effects are very rare.

If my child does not get the chickenpox vaccine, will he get the disease?

Before there was a vaccine, almost everyone got chickenpox. It was one of the most common childhood diseases.

With the vaccine, cases of chickenpox have dropped by about 90%. But if parents don't vaccinate their children, cases could go up again.

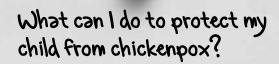
Why not let children get chickenpox naturally?

Chickenpox can be a fairly mild disease, but it isn't always. There's no way to know who will have a mild case and who will be very sick.

What is the MMRV vaccine?

The MMRV vaccine combines the MMR (for measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine with the chickenpox vaccine. It was created to reduce the number of shots children get.

Early findings from an ongoing CDC study show that about 1 additional seizure from fever happens among every 2,000 young children who get the MMRV vaccine, compared with



- ✓ Vaccinate your child on time.
- ✓ Talk with your child's doctor if you have questions.
- ✓ Keep a record of your child's vaccinations to make sure your child is up-to-date.

children who get the MMR and chickenpox vaccines in two separate shots at the same visit. Children with an immediate family member that has seizures from fevers are more likely to have these seizures. These seizures, called febrile seizures, may be scary for parents, but they are not harmful to children.

CDC recommends getting the first dose of MMR and chickenpox vaccines separately for children under 4 years old.

Where can I learn more about the chickenpox vaccine?

To learn more about the chickenpox vaccine or other vaccines, talk to your child's doctor.

Call **800-CDC-INFO** (800-232-4636) or go to **http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines** and check out the following resources:

- Parent's Guide to Childhood Immunization—Varicella (Chickenpox): http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/ parents-guide/default.htm
- Common Questions Parents Ask about Infant Immunizations: http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/ spec-grps/infants/parent-questions.htm
- Vaccines website for parents: http://www.cdc.gov/ vaccines/parents

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Family Physicians, and American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommend all children receive the chickenpox vaccine according to the recommended schedule.